

# High schoolers get hands-on experience

## Students work with engineers in area

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- Tiffanie Dismore

High school students who dream of becoming engineers are getting hands-on experience by solving problems for Caterpillar and Fairfield Manufacturing.

McCutcheon High School engineering teacher Gary Werner has 14 students who work with engineers to solve real life problems in the working world through a program called Project Lead the Way. This is the first time for students at McCutcheon to apply the knowledge they've learned in school.

"Getting out of the classroom and getting out and meeting people. Everything, it looks like it is going to work out on paper, but getting in the those labs, we really see what all the engineers and mechanics do to the product you design," McCutcheon Senior Brian Truex explained.

Engineering teacher Gary Werner said Project Lead the Way gives his students energy and gets them excited about learning.

"It makes them feel like they are really doing something and changing something," Werner said. "When they come back to class and say they have figured something out or fixed something, they get excited about it. They are not in the classroom all day."

"It is more realistic considering you're taking math classes and homework after homework when you can get out and have some fun. Work on some challenging projects," Truex said.

"Here we actually solve the problems," McCutcheon Senior Jake Steffes said. "Or at least try to anyway. It is much easier than trying to visualize it."

McCutcheon Senior Andrew Mueller said working at Caterpillar with engineers has helped him narrow down his interest. He is thinking about majoring in mechanical or chemical engineering.

"I know what to expect kind of," he said. "Talking with my engineer, they tell you what college will be like so you know what you have to look forward to."

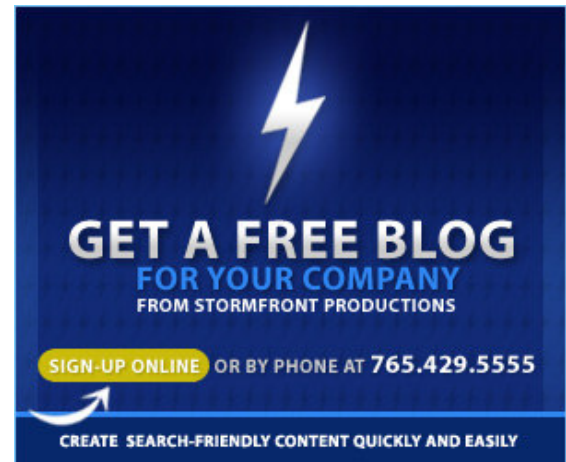
"It really gives them insight into what it means to be an engineer," Fairfield Manufacturing Marketing Executive Michelle Hadley explained. "They can see how they can use that, the knowledge they are learning in the class and how they can apply it on the job."

Caterpillar Assembly Engineer Brian Sanders works with the McCutcheon students on projects. He said having the seniors around helps generate new ways to solve problems.

"They're excited. They come in with new energy and different ideas that some of us don't have," he said.

Each week the students are given a problem to solve. A week later they come back to present their solution to the engineers.

"I feel like I've accomplished something. Sometimes it is difficult to do the project, but after it is done I have kind of a sense of relief," Steffes said.



All three of the students plan on majoring in engineering. Some have already been accepted to Purdue and Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology.